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Abstract:

Recent criticism has shown the poetic power that came from **Wordsworth's** attachment to his **local** environment. By examining his interest in the **Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Northumbria**, this article expands the parameters of that 'local' area across the Pennines. The 1830s saw a revival of interest in **St Cuthbert**, patron saint of the North, and renewed pride in northern medieval history, which was catalysed by **antiquarian** societies and focused around Durham Cathedral. By tracing Wordsworth's reading of **Bede's Ecclesiastical History**, which he pursued in preparation for *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), this essay will also explain Wordsworth's participation in what became Victorian **medievalism**.

Wordsworth's Northumbria: Bede, Cuthbert, and Northern Medievalism

On 17 April 1816, Robert Southey's nine-year-old son, Herbert, died from inflammation on the heart.¹ Three years later, in a letter to Sir George Beaumont, Southey announced the news that his wife had given birth to another son: 'I mean to call him Cuthbert; you who know Wordsworth's poems so well will understand why. From most people I keep such feelings out of sight, as if I were ashamed of them, and for them it is reason enough that it is a good Saxon name, still in use in Northumberland and Durham.'² The names of both of

¹ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, Pt. II, 1812-1820*, ed. by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 305-07 and 320.

² *Memorials of Coleorton: Letters from Coleridge, Wordsworth and His Sister, Southey and Sir Walter Scott to Sir George Beaumont and Lady Beaumont*, ed. by William Knight, 2 vols (Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1887), II, 188. Herbert had been the name of Southey's maternal uncle: Geoffrey Carnall,

Southey's sons are Anglo-Saxon, and the sentiment he was embarrassed to express publicly has its source in the narrative of the interconnected lives of two seventh-century saints, Herbert and Cuthbert.

Southey's letter primarily refers to Wordsworth's poem 'Inscription for the Spot where the Hermitage stood on St Herbert's Island, Derwent-water' (1800), which captures the profound intimacy between these two monks and their shared spiritual commitment:

If thou in the dear love of some one friend
Hast been so happy, that thou know'st what thoughts
Will, sometimes, in the happiness of love
Make the heart sink, then wilt thou reverence
This quiet spot—St. Herbert hither came
And here for many seasons, from the world
Remov'd, and the affections of the world,
He dwelt in solitude. He living here,
This island's soul inhabitant! had left
A Fellow-labourer, whom the good Man lov'd
As his own soul; and when within his cave
Alone he knelt before the crucifix
While o'er the lake the cataract of Lodore
Peal'd to his orisons, and when he pac'd

'Southey, Robert (1774-1843)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2011)

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>> [accessed 5 February 2014].

Along the beach of this small isle and thought
Of his Companion, he had pray'd that both
Might die in the same moment. Nor in vain
So pray'd he:—as our Chronicles report,
Though here the Hermit number'd his last day
Far from St. Cuthbert his beloved friend,
These holy men both died in the same hour.³

Herbert lived in seclusion on Derwent Island near Keswick in the Lake District, while Cuthbert's hermitage was on Farne Island off the coast of Northumberland. The Venerable Bede records that at their final meeting in Carlisle, before retreating into isolated contemplation, Herbert prayed that he would be reunited with Cuthbert in death: 'I beseech you by the Lord not to desert me but to remember your most faithful companion and ask the merciful Lord that, as we served Him together on earth, we may journey together to the skies to behold His grace in Heaven.'⁴ The legend states that the monks did in fact miraculously die in the same moment. Southey's touching allusion to Wordsworth's inscription discloses a secret wish that his sons would one day be united in heaven; yet this vignette also encapsulates much broader connections between the Lake District and the

³ Wordsworth, 'Inscription for the Spot where the Hermitage stood on St Herbert's Island, Derwent-water', in *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James A. Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 179-80.

⁴ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), p. 441. Further references are given parenthetically.

Farne Islands, which are rooted in early Anglo-Saxon history and discernible throughout Wordsworth's work.

Wordsworth uses a specifically detailed title, a vocative opening, and deixis to generate imagined proximity. Inscriptions suppose intimate connections between written language, precise locations, and an associated community of situated readers. The inscription assumes and enhances the work of the distanced chroniclers by inviting present readers to access the sentiment of 'This quiet spot' (l. 5): the place is more powerful than the historical chronicle. Wordsworth draws his current reader into relationship with previous generations of visitors to the island and the appeal to the reader's sense of shared love and happiness matches Wordsworth's celebration of Herbert's emotional acuity. Although Herbert was physically isolated, he remained in Cuthbert's company via prayer and affectionate remembrances; similarly the inscription offers a sense of community to the dispersed readers it addresses.

Herbert was a local patron saint and Wordsworth's poetic memorial of his life and death is consistent with other examples from *Lyrical Ballads*, such as 'Michael', where Wordsworth records the affections and commitments of people whose stories had been retold by several generations of the same community. This local, oral tradition (celebrated explicitly in 'The Brothers') was an important source for Wordsworth during his early career; it underpinned his thinking about poetic language and was part of his self-definition as a poet who had retired to his native Lakes.⁵ However, during the 1820s the sources

⁵ See the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), I, 138-85 and Preface

Wordsworth drew upon were more likely to be written historical documents. As a case in point, Wordsworth first encountered the hagiography of Herbert and Cuthbert as a Lakeland narrative associated with a place he knew well, but the character and application of this knowledge altered when he undertook material research into church history for his sonnet series, *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822).

Wordsworth's treatment of sources and his historical method is one focus of this essay; another is the expanded sense of regional heritage that these sources opened up for him. Recent criticism has shown the poetic power that came from Wordsworth's attachment to his local environment and his sense of place.⁶ However, in remembering that Herbert's renown was inextricably linked with Cuthbert's, I wish to challenge the accepted notion of what constituted Wordsworth's 'local' area. The North East warrants attention because, unlike other places to which Wordsworth's poetry responds (such as Tintern,

to *The Excursion* in *The Excursion*, ed. by Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 38-9.

⁶ See Fiona Stafford's exploration of Wordsworth's local poetics in *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and in 'Wordsworth's Poetry of Place', in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 309-24. Stafford carefully distinguishes between landscape and place: 'A place is not defined merely by appearance or geography, but by a host of associations, private, public, individual or collective, and encompassing local stories, history, religion, culture, economics or politics' ('Wordsworth's Poetry of Place', p. 310). I adopt Stafford's conclusion that Wordsworth is 'concerned with place in its fullest sense, rather than with landscape alone' and build upon her distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives (p. 310). I argue that Wordsworth held the position of an 'insider' of Northumberland and Durham.

Coleorton, London, France, Scotland, Italy, and Germany), that region was part of his Lakeland heritage: according to the Anglo-Saxon territorial division of England, Grasmere was absorbed within the greatest intellectual centre of the period, the Kingdom of Northumbria. As this essay will go on to show, the spiritual communion sustained by Herbert and Cuthbert while they were physically separated typifies a larger cultural continuity between their respective provinces: these monks helped Wordsworth to recognize the geographical and historical parameters of a cohesive trans-Pennine region, stretching from the western Lake District to the east coast of Northumberland.⁷ The 1830s saw a revival of interest in Cuthbert, the patron saint of the North, and renewed pride in northern medieval history, which was catalysed by local antiquarian societies and focused around Durham Cathedral. By tracing Wordsworth's research into Bede's writings, which he undertook in preparation for *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, and analysing the implications of his findings, this essay will also help explain Wordsworth's participation in what became Victorian medievalism.

From the establishment of his home at Grasmere in 1799, Wordsworth's personal relationship with Mary Hutchinson and fondness for her relatives in Sockburn held together those two regions in his affections. However, Wordsworth's poetic and historical exploration of the connections between Grasmere and Northumberland developed fully in the 1820s when he produced two successive sonnet series. *The River Duddon* (1820) is a comprehensive celebration of the Lake District: the volume includes a sequence of sonnets

⁷ Northumbria is the name of the Anglo-Saxon region which covered parts of the counties now known as Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland. Cumberland and Westmorland were renamed as the county of 'Cumbria' in 1974.

describing a day's excursion in the Duddon Valley, short poems on hidden places of local interest, and a prose 'Topographical Description of the Lakes'.⁸ Wordsworth matched this homage to Cumberland with an equally avid study of Durham and Northumberland when, in 1821, he began a course of research for his sonnets on the history of the Church in England. The opening poem of *Ecclesiastical Sketches* declares that the series is a sequel to the *Duddon*: 'I, who descended with glad step to chase | Cerulean Duddon from his cloud-fed spring', until the river reached 'her natural resting-place', now 'seek upon the heights of Time the source | Of a holy River' (l. 1. 1-10).⁹ In the *Duddon* series Wordsworth followed the course of an actual river from source to mouth; through detailed topographical information he arrived in the final sonnet at a vision of transcendence concluding: 'We feel that we are greater than we know' (XXXIII, 14).¹⁰ Tracing the river to its destination, where it is released into the sea, lifted the poet out of physical and temporal knowledge towards a different mode of comprehension. In order to elucidate this feeling, Wordsworth sought the

⁸ The full title of the original edition was: *The River Duddon, a series of sonnets: Vaudracour and Julia: and other poems. To which is annexed, A Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes* (London: Longman, 1820).

⁹ Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, in *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845*, ed. by Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 137-234. All quotation of *Ecclesiastical Sketches* is taken from this edition, with part, poem, and line numbers given parenthetically. Throughout I refer to *Ecclesiastical Sketches* as it was published in 1822, not as it appeared in its enlarged state in 1827 when Wordsworth renamed it *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*.

¹⁰ Wordsworth, *The River Duddon*, in *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems*, ed. by Jackson, pp. 56-98. All quotation of the sonnets is from this edition with by poem and line numbers given parenthetically.

historical fountainhead of Christianity and found it on the opposite coast. In *Ecclesiastical Sketches* the river becomes metaphorical, Wordsworth makes a journey through his sources (not the actual landscape) and his priority is the presentation of history.

Wordsworth's primary source for the first section of the series was Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (completed AD 731).¹¹ Bede (AD 672-735) was the greatest scholar of the so-called Northumbria Renaissance (a period that saw the production of some of the finest literary and artistic work of the Early Middle Ages including the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Stonyhurst St John); almost everything known about this period, in terms of written evidence, is derived from Bede. The purpose of the *Ecclesiastical History* is to tell the story of the conversion of the English people to Christianity, showing how the smaller Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were unified, through faith, into one great English nation. The *History* records events of linear time; it traces the migrations of the pagan populations and the existence of their five languages to the point where, by Christianization, the whole nation is united through shared use of the Latin Bible and the observances of the Church. The nation of Bede's title, the *Angli*, thus signifies the entire English community which, for him, coincides with the Church.¹²

¹¹ While Wordsworth's work on Bede will be the focus of this essay, Abbie Findlay Potts provides a comprehensive account of Wordsworth's other sources (notably Sharon Turner's *History of the Anglo-Saxons*) in *The Ecclesiastical Sonnets of William Wordsworth* (1922) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), pp. 24-7 and the editorial notes, pp. 205-304.

¹² Diane Speed, 'Bede's Creation of a Nation in his *Ecclesiastical History*', *Parergon*, 10.2 (1992), 139-54.

The purpose of the *Ecclesiastical History* corresponds therefore with Wordsworth's purpose, stated in the advertisement to *Ecclesiastical Sketches*:

The Catholic Question, which was agitated in Parliament about that time [1820], kept my thoughts in the same course; and it struck me, that certain points in the Ecclesiastical History of our Country might advantageously be presented to view in Verse. Accordingly I took up the subject, and what I now offer to the Reader, was the result.¹³

The main impetus behind Wordsworth's sonnets was his opposition to Roman Catholic Emancipation, a political issue that had been of national concern since the Act of Union with Ireland (1800). Anti-emancipationists were sceptical as to how Roman Catholics could be loyal to a Protestant throne and concerned that it would be potentially dangerous to allow Catholics access to seats in Parliament.¹⁴ Wordsworth's sonnets were a reaction against the Catholic Relief Bill of 1820; he intended to remind British citizens of the protection they received from a National Church in which the excesses of popery were tempered.

¹³ See *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems*, ed. by Jackson, p. 137.

¹⁴ Debate continued throughout the 1820s with an exchange of rival publications including Robert Southey's *The Book of the Church* (1824), Charles Butler's *Book of the Roman Catholic Church* (1825), and Joseph Blanco White's *Practical and Internal Evidence Against Catholicism* (1825). The Catholic Emancipation Act was passed in April 1829. I discuss Wordsworth's engagement with the Emancipation movement in 'A Question of Loyalty: Wordsworth and the Beaumonts, Catholic Emancipation and *Ecclesiastical Sketches*', *Romanticism* (in press 2015). It is seemingly paradoxical, yet commonplace, for anti-Roman Catholic feeling to go hand-in-hand with medievalism.

Wordsworth objected to Catholic Relief because it was a threat to national cohesion and the identity of English Christians; he undertook this project in order to demonstrate, as Bede had done, the necessity of national ecclesiastical unity.¹⁵

Bede's *History* presents to its readers various men and women as models of Christian piety. One of Bede's heroes is the 'wonderfully humble, kind, and generous' King Oswald. During Oswald's reign the Kingdom of Northumbria reached the peak of its military power as it expanded across the breadth of England. Oswald united the peoples of Bernicia (roughly equivalent to the modern-day counties of Durham and Northumberland) with those of Deira (which covered Yorkshire and parts of Lancashire and Cumbria) by killing the barbaric leader of the Britons, Cædwalla (pp. 213-15). Alongside this martial domination, Bede celebrated the King's conversion to Christianity and irreproachable faith: while 'Oswald gained from the one God who made heaven and earth greater earthly realms than any of his ancestors had possessed', his people 'learned to hope for those heavenly realms which were unknown to their forefathers' (p. 231). Oswald is important to Bede because he exemplifies a central theme of the *Ecclesiastical History*: symbiosis between the Church and

¹⁵ This is consistent with Wordsworth's praise of Spanish Catholicism in his pamphlet *Concerning the Convention of Cintra* (1809). Stephen C. Behrendt argues that 'Wordsworth's sentiments about war, nationhood, and national heroism are inextricably linked with his thoughts about morality and religion'. See 'Wordsworth and Nation', in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed by. Gravil and Robinson, pp. 662-78 (p. 663).

the monarchy.¹⁶ Similarly, Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sketches* promotes the mutual dependence of these two institutions.

The pagan population of Northumbria was Christianized with the help of Oswald's Celtic Bishop, Aidan. In AD 635 Aidan chose the remote island of Lindisfarne (Holy Island) as the episcopal centre of Northumbria, and from there governed the Christian Church as it spread across the Kingdom into the Lake District. These details of conquest and conversion would have struck a local chord for Wordsworth. Grasmere had been aggregated in the province of Deira; the origins of Christianity in Wordsworth's beloved Vale were therefore Northumbrian and accordingly its parish church was dedicated to Oswald.¹⁷ In pursuing a clearer understanding of national identity, as a means of promoting the primacy of the Church of England, Wordsworth gained an enriched sense of regional heritage. As historical and antiquarian pursuits developed throughout the nineteenth century, such an entanglement of regional and national concerns became a familiar pattern. A significant aspect of medievalism is the pursuit of a greater sense of national heritage but (as in the work of Sir Walter Scott for example) enthusiasm for regional history is often central.¹⁸

¹⁶ Marianne Malo Chenard, 'King Oswald's Holy Hands: Metonymy and the Making of a Saint in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*', *Exemplaria*, 17.1 (2005), 33-56 (p. 34).

¹⁷ Mary Armitage argues that to understand the origin of Grasmere church it is necessary to know the evolution of the Kingdom of Northumbria. See *The Church of Grasmere* (Kendal: Titus Wilson, 1912), p. 6.

¹⁸ Matthew Townend explores this pattern in 'Victorian Medievalisms', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 166-83. Alice Chandler discusses the significance of Scott's medievalism in *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 12-51.

Another of Bede's major heroes is St Cuthbert. Unlike the warrior King, Cuthbert led a monastic life. Early in his career he was renowned for eloquent ministry to peasant hill-folk, but as he grew in devotion Cuthbert attained to 'the silence and secrecy of the hermit's life of contemplation' on Farne Island (south-east of Lindisfarne): 'He served God in solitude for many years on this island and so high was the rampart that surrounded his dwelling that he could see nothing else but the heavens which he longed to enter' (pp. 435 and 437). Cuthbert was elected Bishop of Lindisfarne in AD 684 but after two years in the bishopric he took leave of Herbert and finally returned alone to Farne to await death.¹⁹ Bede relates a series of miracles associated with Cuthbert's sainthood, the most famous of which is the incorruptibility of his body. Owing to this reported miracle the bishop's remains were closely guarded by the monks of Lindisfarne, who also placed Oswald's severed head in Cuthbert's coffin and carried it with them each time the ravaging Danes threatened to invade the island

¹⁹ In the confused aftermath of the Synod of Whitby, Cuthbert was chosen to help enforce Roman (rather than Celtic) customs and it is understood that Bede's favourable account of Cuthbert is due to their shared preference for Roman practices, which promoted national cohesion. The Whitby Synod was held to settle disagreement between Celtic and Roman Christians about the dates of Easter and the wearing of the tonsure. The Roman delegation won but in effect Northumbrians continued to follow Celtic traditions for several decades at least. See John L. Gough Meissner, *The Celtic Church in England after the Synod of Whitby* (London: M. Hopkinson, 1929) and Donald Dugard, *The Synod of Whitby, 664* (Whitby: Horne and Son, 1964).

(pp. 443-45). Durham Cathedral was built in 1093 to house Cuthbert's coffin and the alleged uncorrupted state of his body gave him uninterrupted hagiographic eminence until 1827.²⁰

Wordsworth celebrated Bede's scholarship in the sonnet 'Reproof' (l. 23):

BUT what if One, thro' grove or flowery mead,
Indulging thus at will the creeping feet
Of a voluptuous indolence, should meet
The hovering Shade of venerable Bede;
The Saint, the Scholar, from a circle freed
Of toil stupendous, in a hallowed seat
Of Learning, where he heard the billows beat
On a wild coast—rough monitors to feed
Perpetual industry. Sublime Recluse!
The recreant soul, that dares to shun the debt
Imposed on human kind, must first forget
Thy diligence, thy unrelaxing use
Of long life; and, in the hour of death,
The last dear service of thy passing breath!²¹

²⁰ James Raine, *Saint Cuthbert: With an Account of the State in which his Remains were found upon the opening of his Tomb in Durham Cathedral in the year MDCCXXVII* (Durham: F. Humble, 1828), p. 73.

²¹ Wordsworth's note explains that Bede 'expired in the act of concluding a translation of St John's Gospel'. See *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems*, ed. by Jackson, p. 152.

This sonnet breaks away from the historical narrative of *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (which to this point has covered the demise of the druids, the Saxon conquest, and the first Christian conversions). Elsewhere Wordsworth versifies snapshots from Bede's *History*, but here his focus is the author of the source material rather than that material itself: the poet reflexively compares his own productivity, procedures, and vocation to those of his venerable tutor. Wordsworth's own voice is present in 'Reproof' and the opening 'But' connects this poem with its predecessor in the series where Wordsworth confesses a desire to retreat into a pastoral hermitage fully equipped with 'beechen bowl' and 'maple dish': 'Methinks that to some vacant Hermitage | My feet would rather turn' (l. 22. 9, 10, 1-2). The effect of these pastoral tropes is to draw attention to Wordsworth's identity as a poet, rather than a saint or scholar.

There are two types of shade in the opening quatrain: the pleasant shelter of the grove and the imposing shadow of Bede. Wordsworth imagines himself wandering in a grove or meadow of protected idleness; in doing so he indicates the naivety of the pastoral idyll in which poets bask in Arcadian 'voluptuous indolence'. This is entirely different from Bede's 'venerable' fixed 'seat | Of Learning'. Wordsworth recalls himself from this easeful, sensuous pleasure and contrasts the sheltered vale of Grasmere with the exposed Northumbrian coast. Bede resided in a 'wild' spot that was threatened by beating billows — great swollen waves that have the figurative implication of imminent death by an overwhelming flood. These billows are the 'rough monitors' that 'feed' the saint's 'Perpetual industry'; thus it is recognition of mortality, discernible in the inhospitable coastline, that fuels Bede's progress. This Northumbrian stimulus bears little resemblance to the verdant

‘life and food | For future years’ that had nourished Wordsworth’s poetic vocation earlier in his career.²²

Wordsworth worries that his own tendency towards poetic indulgence deviates from Bede’s utilitarian ‘toil’, ‘industry’, and ‘diligence’ (against which we might compare Keats’ sentiments in his ‘Ode on Indolence’ written in 1819). Wordsworth’s ‘recreant soul’, which hoped to thrive in pastoral ease, is exhausted, especially in respect of his great incomplete *Recluse* project (evoked at the sonnet’s volta). However, the task Wordsworth undertakes in *Ecclesiastical Sketches* involves galvanising national feeling against Catholic Emancipation by balancing historical research with poetic skill. The pastoral tropes that he first registers then rejects, act as reminders of his negotiation of the boundary between scholarship and art. This is a sonnet series, not historical prose.

The 1822 volume consists of one hundred and two Petrarchan sonnets which hold up for idolization the National Church in its various turns of character. Wordsworth attempts to convince the reader of his intimate attachment to the institution by juxtaposing personal and public themes, as for example in the paired sonnets that open the third section of the series. ‘I saw the figure of a lovely maid’ describes a vision of Wordsworth’s daughter Dora and the anxiety he felt when it dissolved and ‘melted into air’ (III. 1. 14). The distress caused by this dreamed demise of Dora’s image is no less than the concern he feels when he envisions the Church. ‘Patriotic Sympathies’ argues that although these thoughts of Dora may seem

²² ‘Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’, ll. 65-6, in *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*, ed. by Butler and Green, pp. 116-20 (p. 118).

To lie dissevered from our present theme;
Yet do I love my Country—and partake
Of kindred agitations for her sake. (III. 2. 3-5)

Hence, Wordsworth endeavours to demonstrate his emotional investment in Church history, whilst in 'Reproof' he censures himself for not working at an objective, industrious distance.

There are thus contradictions in Wordsworth's procedures. *Ecclesiastical Sketches* has a muted devotional quality; it is an historical narrative in verse and Wordsworth's chosen form, the sonnet, keeps itself closely regulated.²³ The pastoral imagery is self-consciously poetic, self-indulgent, and indicative of playfulness and so must likewise be tempered. Not only does Bede's *History* shape the contents of Wordsworth's sonnets but Bede's austere life and method keeps the emotive, devotional, and artful character of Wordsworth's poems in check.

As well as being a methodological monitor, 'Reproof' has verbal links with Wordsworth's Derwent Island 'Inscription'. The final couplet of the sonnet, which emphasizes Bede's 'last dear service' 'in the hour of death' and his 'passing breath' (l. 23. 13-14), recalls the concluding lines of the inscription which focus on the simultaneous deaths of Herbert and Cuthbert:

²³ Wordsworth saw the restrictions of the sonnet form as liberating when he compared formal limitation to the elected confinement of a nun or a hermit in his sonnet 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room', in *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 133.

Nor in vain

So prayed he: — as our Chronicles report,
Though here the Hermit numbered his last day,
Far from St Cuthbert his beloved Friend,
These holy men both died in the same hour. (ll. 17-24)²⁴

Wordsworth's choice of preposition ('*in* the same hour' as opposed to '*at* the same hour') emphasizes spatiality over temporality. The final breath taken by each man collapsed the physical distance between them as they were reunited. Bede's dying breath signified the passage of his writings into the hands of his descendants and the urtext of all the possible 'Chronicles' to which Wordsworth could refer is the *Ecclesiastical History*. For Wordsworth, Bede's work breaks down the spatial distinction between Derwentwater and Farne by evoking a time when these islands were united through Northumbrian episcopal government and by the harmonious prayers of their hermits. In terms of ecclesiastical geography, there was not in fact any great distance between Herbert and Cuthbert. Bede therefore helps Wordsworth to recognize that his local religious heritage reaches across the Pennines.

Bede's *History* permeated eighteenth-century topographical studies including Joseph Nicolson and Richard Burn's *The History and Antiquities of the Counties of Westmorland and Cumberland* (1777) and James Clarke's *A Survey of the Lakes* (1789). Marijane Osborn identifies these as the sources from which Wordsworth extracted the scenery for *The*

²⁴ Wordsworth revised this 'Inscription for the Spot where the Hermitage stood' in 1827 as he revised *Ecclesiastical Sketches* but the final lines remained unchanged.

Borderers.²⁵ Wordsworth first composed the play at Racedown in 1796-97 but the detailed study of Bede that he undertook in the 1820s inflected the revisions Wordsworth made before its publication in 1842. In the 'Fenwick Note' to *The Borderers* (dictated in 1843) Wordsworth states his intention to 'colour the manners [of its characters] in some degree from local history'; by the time he revised the play, the parameters of this 'local' heritage had expanded in a Northumbrian direction.²⁶

The plot revolves around themes of criminal motivation and responsibility. The protagonist, Oswald, convinces Marmaduke that Baron Herbert, the blind father of Marmaduke's beloved Idonea, has sold her to the evil Baron Clifford. Oswald persuades Marmaduke to kill Herbert, who is undertaking an arduous journey in an attempt to regain his lands after returning from the Crusades. Wordsworth chose the name 'Herbert' for his venerable victim because of its connotation with the hermit of Derwentwater,²⁷ and he is

²⁵ Marijane Osborn, 'Wordsworth's *Borderers* and the Landscape of Penrith', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, 76 (1976), 144-58.

²⁶ *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), pp. 156-57. Wordsworth revised the play between December 1841 and May 1842 for publication in *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (London: Moxon, 1842). The play's publication alongside Wordsworth's *Sonnets on the Punishment of Death* reinforces the theme of criminal responsibility. The Godwinian contexts of the play have been extensively discussed: see for example David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), pp. 44-68.

²⁷ Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, ed. by Robert Osborn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 26 and 71. Unless otherwise stated, all reference to characters' names and quotations are taken from this late version, with act, scene, and line numbers given parenthetically.

the only major character whose name Wordsworth retains in the 1842 version. Throughout the play, Wordsworth conflates saints Herbert and Cuthbert within this single character. Baron Herbert is associated with St Cuthbert through his affinity with birds: Herbert describes himself and Idonea as ‘two songsters bred | In the same nest’ (I. 1. 150-01) and presents her as a ‘Raven in the wilderness’ who brought him food (II. 3. 847); St Cuthbert is said to have tamed the birds of Lindisfarne and performed miracles for them.²⁸ Moreover, on returning from Palestine and finding his ‘domains [...] usurped’ (I. 1. 194), Herbert is offered ‘food and raiment’ and a ‘humble Cot’ from ‘the good Abbot of St Cuthbert’s’ (I. 1. 199-202). Perhaps, as Robert Osborn’s editorial note suggests, Wordsworth was following James Clarke’s report that Cuthbert had given the hermitage on Derwent Island to St Herbert as a gift. By 1842, however, Wordsworth knew from Bede that Clarke was in fact mistaken. The persistence of the detail in the revised version of the play indicates Wordsworth’s intentional involvement of the figure of St Cuthbert in the blind man’s effort to regain his proper home.

Marijane Osborn argues that the landscape of the original *Borderers* is that of Penrith. It seems however that as Wordsworth revised the text he telescoped the regions of Cumberland and Northumberland. In the 1796-97 version, the Host resides on the road along which pilgrims travel towards St Mary’s shrine (I. 2. 31-32): Marijane Osborn identifies a well dedicated to St Mary in the town of Brough, south of Penrith,²⁹ while Robert Osborn speculates that the pilgrims are journeying to St Mary’s in Carlisle.³⁰ Either way, in 1842

²⁸ Raine, *Saint Cuthbert*, p. 22.

²⁹ Marijane Osborn, p. 148.

³⁰ *The Borderers*, ed. by Robert Osborn, p. 98.

Wordsworth substituted these Marian travellers for St Cuthbert's pilgrims ('St Cuthbert and his Pilgrims | [...] are to us a stream of comfort', I. 2. 324-25; 'Gentle Pilgrims, | St Cuthbert speed you on your holy errand', III. 1. 1140-41). This has two consequences. When Idonea leaves her father, Herbert's role as her protector is given to Cuthbertonians. Furthermore, while other characters refer to specific places including Eskdale, Kirkoswald (both in Cumberland), and Liddesdale (in southern Scotland), Wordsworth imaginatively translates a portion of the action from Carlisle to the north-east coast where St Cuthbert's pilgrims would have been found.³¹ By revising the text in this way, Wordsworth diffused the setting of *The Borderers* such that he figuratively collapsed the space between the Lake District and Northumberland; he thus conjures one continuous region that covers the breadth of King Oswald's Northumbria.³²

³¹ Sir Walter Scott made seven 'raids', as he called them, into Liddesdale in order to gather medieval material for his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-1803). See Chandler, p. 27.

³² While I acknowledge Wordsworth's admiration for Scotland and Scottish poetry, it is not my purpose to pursue that theme. It does not seem that Wordsworth identified himself as an heir to Scottish literary tradition, nor is there the same historical connection between the Lakes and Scotland as there is between the Lakes and Northumberland. In a letter of 1825 he writes: 'Do not say I ought to have been a Scotchman. Tear me not from the Country of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. [...] [However] I have been indebted to the North [Scotland] for more than I shall ever be able to acknowledge' (*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, Pt. I, 1821-1828*, ed. by Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 402). See Fiona Stafford, 'Inhabited Solitudes: Wordsworth in Scotland, 1803', in *Scotland, Ireland, and the Romantic Aesthetic*, ed. by David Duff and Catherine Jones (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 93-113.

There is ongoing speculation about the origination and revision of nomenclature in *The Borderers*. Various arguments have been fuelled by Stephen Parrish's confirmation that the manuscripts provide no indication of the date at which Wordsworth changed the names of his main characters.³³ The action is set during the Barons' Wars of 1265 against the backdrop of the Crusades, but in altering the name of 'Rivers' to 'Oswald' Wordsworth further develops the play's Northumbrian framework.³⁴

According to Bede's description, King Oswald was primarily a man of war. In post-conquest iconography St Cuthbert is usually shown carrying Oswald's severed head, bringing Oswald's violent life into apposition with the contemplation of Cuthbert's. Bede celebrates Oswald's military achievements without reservation, yet Wordsworth turns away from Bede's precedent by using the name 'Oswald' for his villainous character. This decision is pertinent to *The Borderers*' struggle over definitions of action within the context of crusading:

Action is transitory— a step, a blow,

³³ Mary Moorman states that Wordsworth changed the names 'for reasons which we do not know', although she notes that all of the names appear in Nicolson and Burn. See *William Wordsworth: A Biography, the Later Years* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), pp. 535-6. For an example of an alternative interpretation see Burton R. Pollin, 'Permutations of the Names in *The Borderers*, or Hints of Godwin, Charles Lloyd, and a Real Renegade', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 41 (1973), 31-35.

³⁴ The Barons' Wars came to a climax at the Battle of Evesham, August 1265. Simon de Montfort, who imprisoned the King, was defeated by Prince Edward. De Montfort's headless corpse was buried in the abbey at Evesham, which became a place of pilgrimage. King Oswald was likewise decapitated. See Robert Osborn's editorial note to *The Borderers*, II. 3. 330-34.

The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
'Tis done, and in the after vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity. (III. 5. 1539-44)

Wordsworth had long been troubled (as is evident in 'Reproof') by the necessity to balance productivity with contemplation. In *The Borderers*, Oswald teaches Marmaduke the insubstantial nature of action: the crime Oswald commits against his captain is not unquestionably criminal because he was betrayed into it; similarly, Marmaduke's murder of Herbert results from omission rather than positive violence. The spread of Christianity across the Anglo-Saxon border region was the result of King Oswald's celebrated crusade but, in selecting this name for his anti-hero, Wordsworth captures the play's ambiguity about the inherent value of physical action as he refuses to reconcile war with exemplary Christianity.

In 1837 Wordsworth used this central passage from *The Borderers* as an epigraph to *The White Doe of Rylstone*.³⁵ This narrative poem (composed in 1807 and first published in 1815) relates the fate of the Norton family during the Roman Catholic revolt against Elizabeth I, 'The Rising of the North' (1569). Norton leads an army of Catholic noblemen to Durham Cathedral where they occupy St Cuthbert's shrine in an attempt to reclaim it from

³⁵ All quotation of the poem is taken from the reading text in *The White Doe of Rylstone: Or, The Fate of the Nortons*, ed. by Kristine Dugas (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Line references appear parenthetically.

the new Protestant authorities. The poem is partly set within the ruins of Bolton Priory and its medieval garden, and there are various allusions to Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590).³⁶ Emily Norton, the Protestant daughter of the leader of the Catholic forces, waits in agonizing meditation while her father and brothers are killed. Emily's piety is elevated above the activity of the rebels; the mortal blows received by Norton's army are over in an instant, but Emily's suffering 'shares the nature of infinity'. She finally receives consolation from a doe with which she engages in a form of silent communication. *The White Doe* is about the struggle between regional religious heritage and national religious unity. In agreement with the message of Bede's *History*, Wordsworth's heroine is committed to the national faith but, unlike King Oswald, she triumphs through pacifism.

However, like Oswald's infection of Marmaduke's opinion about Herbert, the pinnacle of the force exerted by Norton's Catholic noblemen is verbal:

And thus, in arms, a zealous Band
Proceeding under joint command,
To Durham first their course they bear;
And in Saint Cuthbert's ancient seat
Sang Mass, —and tore the book of Prayer,—
And trod the Bible beneath their feet. (Canto III, 716-21)

³⁶ See Wordsworth's prefatory poem, 'In trellis'd shed', in *The White Doe*, pp. 78-80 and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) in particular Book I, Canto III.

The singing of Mass and the attack on the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and the Bible is an act of symbolic violence, not a physical 'step' or 'blow'. It therefore has a more permanent effect than transitory force. The relics of Cuthbert, Oswald, and Bede were housed together at Durham Cathedral, which became a focus of northern medievalism. St Cuthbert is the figurehead of regional religious identity, and perhaps the worst crime committed by the nobles is this defilement of his shrine. After the Reformation and under a Protestant monarchy, Cuthbert was not primarily a Roman Catholic patron but a cynosure of regional pride within the National Church. In other words, regional identity must adapt for the sake of national unity. Turning against the modified regional heritage is what precipitates Norton's eventual defeat.³⁷ Wordsworth's poetic representation of this episode from Early Modern ecclesiastical history is thus an important precursor to *Ecclesiastical Sketches*: it helps explain Wordsworth's attraction to Bede (who wanted inherited regional religion to yield to national church authority) and his later thinking behind revisions to *The Borderers*.

Moreover, *The White Doe* signals a shift in the nature of Wordsworth's source material. Before 1807 he drew predominantly on oral narratives and his own memories, but for this poem he plumbs written historical records. Wordsworth adapted the story of 'The Rising of the North' from Thomas Dunham Whitaker's *History and Antiquities of the Deanery*

³⁷ Tonya Moutray discusses Wordsworth's reformulation of historic Catholic practices in 'Remodelling Catholic Ruins in William Wordsworth's Poetry', *European Romantic Review*, 22 (2011), 819-31.

of *Craven* (1805), which he studied after visiting Bolton Abbey in 1807.³⁸ The bulk of Wordsworth's knowledge of monastic history came from antiquarian and topographical volumes such as Whitaker's, which explain in detail the economic and social influence of the region's powerful Cistercian houses. Wordsworth began to learn about ecclesiastical history through deepening his knowledge of how the geographical and cultural landscapes of Northumberland, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Cumbria were shaped by the presence and dissolution of medieval monastic communities. The regional, topographical flavour of this research is characteristic of the antiquarian activities that began to thrive in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Wordsworth had the opportunity to visit the prominent antiquarian James Raine (1791-1958) during a three-week tour of Durham and Northumberland in July 1838. Dora Wordsworth reports that, accompanied by Isabella Fenwick (a native of Northumberland), her father planned to travel to Lindisfarne and then on to Durham; he would also visit relatives in Stockton before returning to Rydal Mount.³⁹ In the event, the itinerary turned

³⁸ Dorothy Wordsworth explains that her brother had 'greedily' devoured Whitaker's work in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, Pt. I, 1806-1811*, ed. by Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 157-58 and 167.

³⁹ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, Pt. III, 1835-1839*, ed. by Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), p. 617. The tour began with a railway journey from Carlisle to Newcastle, a line that was officially opened on 18 June 1838. 'The Newcastle and Carlisle Railway' was the first across Britain and the result of three decades of campaigning for an efficient transport link between the two sides of the Pennines. See John S. MacLean, *The Newcastle and Carlisle Railway, 1825-1862* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: R. Robinson, 1948). The coming of the railways is often considered as a stimulus for medievalism.

out differently. Wordsworth stayed in Newcastle on 5-6th July; from there he went to Northumberland where he remained for a few days at Witton-le-Wear with Fenwick's cousin George Taylor. He then travelled onwards to Durham University where he received an honorary degree on 21st July.⁴⁰ Taylor and Raine were close friends and fellow members of the Surtees Society. This antiquarian group was founded in 1834 in memory of Robert Surtees (1779-1834) to preserve and promote the intellectual, moral, and religious history of northern England.⁴¹ While staying with Taylor, Wordsworth made an excursion to Raine's home at Crook Hall and received a guided tour of the ruins of Finchale Priory.⁴² Raine was an expert on the medieval monastic world, particularly St Cuthbert, and his study of Durham Cathedral was one of possibly three books on the topic that were in Wordsworth's library.⁴³

James Raine made his name with a momentous exposition of St Cuthbert's relics. On 17 May 1827, he exhumed Cuthbert's remains at Durham Cathedral, confirming that the miracle of incorruptibility was a hoax. While one might expect this discovery to disrupt pride in the region's Anglo-Saxon heritage, the purpose of Raine's work (in line with the principles

⁴⁰ *The Later Years, Pt. III*, pp. 630, 638, and 741.

⁴¹ James Raine, *A Raine Miscellany*, ed. by Angela Marsden (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Athenæum Press, 1991), p. 5.

⁴² Jessica Fay, 'William Wordsworth's Visit to James Raine and Finchale Priory, July 1838', *Notes and Queries*, 60 (2013), 248-51.

⁴³ James Raine, *A Brief Account of Durham Cathedral, with Notices of the Castle, University, City Churches* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: [n. pub], 1833). Chester L. Shaver, *Wordsworth's Library: A Catalogue* (New York: Garland, 1979), p. 210. The other possibilities are Christopher Hunter, *Durham Cathedral, as it was before the Dissolution of the Monastery* (Durham: [n. pub], 1733) and Sir Henry Charles Englefield, *Some Account of the Cathedral Church of Durham* (London: [n. pub], 1810).

of the Surtees Society) was to preserve Cuthbert's reputation by emphasizing the simplicity of his manners and his unfeigned piety.⁴⁴ Raine's study of the saint, published in 1828, helped to popularize the medieval culture of the North; it explains how Cuthbert's legacy shaped the history of the area and asserts that the hermit of Farne should be revered accordingly.

Vogue for amateur archaeological, architectural, topographical, and historical societies developed in the 1830s. Charles Dellheim lists thirty-eight such societies founded between the 1830s and the 1890s, and the Surtees Society is first on his list.⁴⁵ Provincial pride and a desire to mitigate the sense of rootlessness produced by the rapid economic and social changes of the early Victorian period were the major forces behind the popularity of these dilettante groups. Their emphasis was on visual artefacts, fieldwork, and a desire to preserve monuments and church architecture that were falling into dilapidation. The key characteristic of these societies was their local perspective: 'Proudly preoccupied as they were by the history and topography of their own localities, they rarely ventured beyond their self-set geographical limits'.⁴⁶ Wordsworth's meeting with Raine in 1838 at the site of Finchale Priory highlights the poet's own antiquarian inclinations. Not only did Wordsworth gain insight into his Anglo-Saxon heritage through textual sources, but his life-long habit of

⁴⁴ Raine, *St Cuthbert*, p. 36.

⁴⁵ Charles Dellheim, *The Face of the Past: The Preservation of the Medieval Inheritance in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 47-48.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

visiting ruined monasteries (Tintern, Furness, Whitby, Kirkstall, Rievaulx, and Bolton, to name but a few examples) made him sympathetic to the activities of these antiquarians.⁴⁷

While numerous amateur historians worked with evidence from the past to galvanise medievalist enthusiasm, Grace Darling, a girl from the Farne Islands, did so by performing an act of valiant heroism in the present. On 7 September 1838, the daughter of the lighthouse keeper on the outer Farne Island of Longstone noticed that the Forfarshire steamship had struck some rocks off shore and broken in two. Along with her father, she managed to row towards the wreckage through a dangerous storm and rescued nine of the sixty-two people on board. Grace Darling became instantly famous. Her image was printed on souvenirs, knick-knacks, pottery, and porcelain; squares of her dress and locks of her hair were distributed like holy relics to admirers all over the country; she was the subject of two

⁴⁷ Wordsworth's early exploration of ruins was partly a pursuit of fashionable picturesque aesthetics, but in the context of his later interest in his own Northumbrian heritage, it is also an element of medievalist antiquarian enquiry. The taste for medieval ecclesiastical architecture had developed with the Cambridge Camden Society. This Anglican ecclesiological group researched and promoted the science, operations, and symbolism of medieval churches. Wordsworth visited the society meeting of 7 November 1844 and was adopted as a founding member. Their records state: '[Wordsworth] had sown the seed which was branching out now among them, as in other directions, to the recall of whatever was pure and imaginative, whatever was not merely utilitarian, to the service of both Church and State'. This passage from the society's publication, *The Ecclesiologist*, is quoted in James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 28.

novels, three biographies, and innumerable poems and paintings.⁴⁸ Symbolizing all that was Christian and gallant, Grace Darling (with her streaming hair) attained iconographic status in the mid-nineteenth century. Even more than Raine, she served to reignite public interest in Cuthbert and the Farne Islands as she was framed as the saint's successor.⁴⁹ At her death, aged 26, on 20 October 1842, it was immediately suggested that the Chapel of St Cuthbert on Farne, which had been in ruins for a thousand years, should be restored in her memory; Queen Victoria, an avowed devotee of all things Anglo-Saxon, donated ten pounds to the project.⁵⁰ In addition, a canopied thirteenth-century style tomb was erected for Darling on the site of King Oswald's royal residence at Bamborough. When the restoration of Cuthbert's Chapel was complete in 1848, it contained a memorial stone to Grace Darling upon which was inscribed a poem by Wordsworth in honour of this daughter of Northumbria.

Wordsworth's poem is one example from a plethora of literary and non-literary Grace Darling paraphernalia. Widespread fanaticism in response to her rescue effort

⁴⁸ Jerrold Vernon, *Grace Darling, the Maid of the Isles* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: [n. pub], 1839); George William Reynolds, *Grace Darling, or The Heroine of the Farne Islands* (London: [n. pub], 1839); Constance Smedley, *Grace Darling and Her Times* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1932); Richard Armstrong, *Grace Darling: Maid and Myth* (London: Dent and Sons, 1965). Smedley writes: 'To give a comprehensive bibliography of the poems [composed to commemorate her deed] is impossible; the stream that issued at the time of the occasion, has continued throughout the years' (p. 140). Apart from Wordsworth's poem, the most notable is by Swinburne.

⁴⁹ 'These islands, though hallowed by the residence of the holy St Cuthbert, and known as the place of his death have been but rarely visited by the tourist' (Vernon, p. 7).

⁵⁰ Armstrong, p. 17.

became part of the cult of Northumbria, but why was she so energetically memorialized as a medieval heroine? Darling was not a consecrated person, a religious diplomat, nor a renowned leader, but she did perform an exemplary Christian act that Bede might well have celebrated. The major explanation, however, for the particular presentation of Darling as a successor of St Cuthbert is her origination: Grace Darling's identity as a native of the Farne Islands commands her Cuthbertonian appeal. Her brave achievement is enriched by the actions of the earlier inhabitant of those islands. The almost-hagiographic treatment of Grace Darling therefore makes sense in light of the aims of local antiquarian groups whose members hoped to understand the rapid advancement and success of recent decades by locating it within a larger historical narrative reaching back to moments of Saxon glory.⁵¹ Wordsworth's poem partakes in this regional attempt to understand an extraordinary contemporary event by framing it in the medieval past.

Wordsworth's ninety-seven lines of blank verse narrate how Grace Darling spotted the wreckage, alerted her parents, and gave her father the courage to join her perilous rescue attempt. Darling was aged twenty-two at the time but Wordsworth presents her as

⁵¹ Writers also tried to ease the pain of recent industrial changes by seeking medieval solutions. For example, Thomas Carlyle's novel *Past and Present* (1843) reimagines the medieval community at Bury St Edmunds in an attempt to find an answer to the problems facing his own greedy, industrialized society.

much younger ('Together they put forth, Father and Child!')⁵² and emphasises her secluded childhood:

Among the dwellers in the silent fields
The natural heart is touched, and public way
And crowded street resound with ballad strains,
Inspired by ONE whose very name bespeaks
Favour divine, exalting human love;
Whom, since her birth on bleak Northumbria's coast,
Known unto few but prized as far as known,
A single Act endears to high and low
Through the whole land. (ll. 1-9)

The opening phrases are reminiscent of 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (where Wordsworth evokes a hidden hermit) and the poem's emphasis on a young girl who epitomized the spirit of her provincial community makes 'Grace Darling' a *Lyrical Ballad* of the 1840s.⁵³ Wordsworth connects Darling with Bede and Cuthbert through use of the

⁵² Wordsworth, 'Grace Darling', in *Last Poems, 1821-1850*, ed. by Jared R. Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 376-77 (l. 50). For further quotations, line references are given parenthetically.

⁵³ Wordsworth captured the heroism of another daughter of Northumbria in 'Alice Fell'. This little girl who took immense pride in her single possession, her cloak, came from Durham.

medieval name of the region ('bleak Northumbria's coast', rather than Northumberland); this is also a means of connecting Darling with the poet's own Christian heritage.

A Maiden gentle, yet, at duty's call,
Firm and unflinching, as the Lighthouse reared
On the Island-rock, her lonely dwelling-place;
Or like the invincible Rock itself that braves,
Age after age, the hostile elements,
As when it guarded holy Cuthbert's cell. (ll. 22-27)

Darling's motivation was to protect others and she emitted (like the lighthouse) a kindness that was outward looking. Her resilience also matched the harsh elements in which she had grown up. As that coastline's beating billows had propelled Bede's work in 'Reproof' (l. 23. 7), the 'invincible Rock' fuelled Darling's courage. In both cases, Wordsworth suggests that Christian endeavour is conditioned by one's environment: the landscape nurtures moral action and religious sentiment. Beliefs and expressions of those beliefs are therefore part of an inherited communal identity.

Wordsworth composed and printed 'Grace Darling' during a ten-day trip to Carlisle through February and March 1843.⁵⁴ He produced the poem for limited private circulation and did not offer it to his London publisher Edward Moxon. But why did Wordsworth try to keep 'Grace Darling' from widespread distribution and why would he want the place of

⁵⁴ Wordsworth and his wife Mary were visiting their son Willy (*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, Pt. IV, 1840-1853*, ed. by Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 399.

publication specifically to read 'Carlisle'?⁵⁵ St Herbert and St Cuthbert had their final meeting at Carlisle; it was there that they pledged to be united in prayer and spirit. As such, Carlisle is the imaginative centre of the ongoing connection between Cumberland and Northumberland: it is a place from which Wordsworth is able to claim Grace Darling as his local heroine. There could be no better location to compose and print this poem than the spot where the inextricable tie between Derwent Island in Keswick and Farne Island in Northumberland had been compacted in AD 686.

Soon after his return from Carlisle, Wordsworth attended the funeral of Robert Southey in Keswick. Wordsworth would have seen Herbert Southey's grave and been mindful of the boy's surviving brother, Cuthbert (whom he promised to mentor as the prospective executor of Southey's literary remains). That same day, Wordsworth sent out three copies of 'Grace Darling' to various correspondents, insisting that the poem was not for a public audience. A few days later, the poet was invited to become Queen Victoria's Laureate. He refused the position directly and proceeded to send out three more copies of 'Grace Darling' to his acquaintances.⁵⁶ After some persuasion, Wordsworth accepted the

⁵⁵ Mark Reed, *A Bibliography of William Wordsworth, 1798-1930*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), I, 166. As it was originally printed, the place of publication appears prominently at the foot of the poem. I am grateful to the archivists at St John's College, Cambridge, for the opportunity to consult their autographed copy.

⁵⁶ *The Later Years, Pt. IV*, pp. 406-10 and 418-22. The first person to whom Wordsworth sent a copy was Richard Parkinson who was at that time seeking permission to publish the 'Memoir of the Rev. Robert Walker' as a preface to his forthcoming book. This memoir, which celebrates the holy life of an unknown Lakeland priest, was published as a note to a sonnet from *The River Duddon* (See *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems*, ed. by Jackson, pp. 86-97). In the same way, 'Grace Darling' could be

royal appointment and almost immediately 'Grace Darling' appeared in the *Kentish Observer* without his permission.⁵⁷ The ballad Wordsworth had produced in a local context unintentionally became the first publication of his reluctant Laureateship. Since 1838, Darling had been appropriated as a national as well as a Northumbrian icon. On the brink of his own official shift from poet of the North to poet of the Nation, Wordsworth was reasserting the deepest roots of his regional identity.

When 'Grace Darling' was eventually etched on the memorial stone at St Cuthbert's renovated shrine on Farne Island, it was converted into an inscription which, in parallel with the 'Inscription' for St Herbert's hermitage, expressed cohesion between two areas of an historic kingdom that are now considered to be culturally separate. Whilst Wordsworth's attachment to the Lake District is undeniable, the degrees of his regional allegiance were set, particularly from the 1820s onwards, with an Anglo-Saxon compass.

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read as a note to *Ecclesiastical Sketches* and Wordsworth implies that Walker's impeccable Christian character is mirrored in the Northumbrian heroine (*The Later Years, Pt. IV*, pp. 400-01).

⁵⁷ J. D. Vann, 'The Publication of Wordsworth's "Grace Darling"', *Notes and Queries*, 223 (1978), 223-25.

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